



OFFICE OF REPRESENTATIVE MARCUS OSHIRO
HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER
State Capitol, Room 439, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Opening Day Speech
January 18, 2006

INTRODUCTION

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Aloha Governor Lingle, Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. Aiona, Congressman Abercrombie; Congressman and Mrs. Case, Chief Justice Moon, OHA Board Chair Apoliona, Mayor and Mrs. Hannemann, Mayors Kim and Arakawa; former Governor and Mrs. Ariyoshi; former Governor and Mrs. Waihee; former Lieutenant Governor Hirono; Associate Justices of the Hawaii Supreme Court, distinguished guests, colleagues, friends and families.

It is indeed an honor and a privilege to stand in this chamber today, to share the highlights of the Democratic Caucus with you and the people of Hawaii.

First, let me say that I too thoroughly enjoyed today's entertainment. Celebrating the anniversaries of immigrants to Hawaii is a very special part of our culture. In some way or another, we are all immigrants to Hawaii and share a common appreciation of our forefathers and early arrivals to these shores.

Whether you trace your roots to the first Polynesian voyagers, European explorers or Missionaries, Chinese or Japanese field hands, or Portuguese or Korean laborers, we are all bound together by a common heritage of people in search of a home and a better life for their children and themselves.

As I look across the gallery at the sea of multi-ethnic faces, men and women who descended from immigrant families and who are now our community, government, and business leaders, I wonder how many other states have opened their legislative sessions honoring their ethnic diversity? How lucky we are to live in a place where diversity is celebrated. Dr. Martin Luther King would have been proud of what Hawaii is and proud of what Hawaii can become. Hawaii is No Ka Oi.

Today, on behalf of the Democratic Caucus, let me congratulate all of those of Filipino ancestry, including my colleagues and members of our Filipino Caucus -- Representatives Abinsay, Berg, Cabanilla, Finnegan, Magaoay, and Sonson. To all Filipinos and Filipinos at **heart, I say "Aloha" and "Mabuhay". "Mabuhay" to** Filipinos in Hawaii, "100 Years and Beyond."

Those last two words. . . "and Beyond". . . are important. If we truly honor the 100 years of the past - - all the blood, sweat, and tears, hardship, loss, and sacrifice, of the generations that came before us -- we must be as responsible as they were to save and invest for a better future, to think about the next generation, and to work together for that most promising tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, Hawaii has passed through some rough waters over the past 15 years. We have shown our grit and resolve by withstanding the challenges of the Persian-Gulf War, the SARS Epidemic, and the terrorist attacks of 9-11. It was during these challenging and uncertain times that your Democratic Legislature made prudent budgetary and policy decisions to create the large surplus we enjoy today.

Indeed, under the exemplary leadership of Speaker Emeritus Joseph Souki, yourself as former Chair of the House Finance Committee, and the current Finance Chair Dwight Takamine, we remained committed to the common good and forged sound fiscal policy that would provide us with today's 600 million dollar surplus. I wish Governor Cayetano was here today so that we could publicly thank him and give credit where credit is due.

For my newer colleagues, please know that this surplus did not come easy. It did not come fast. There were no free lunches. But we kept the faith in each other, and together as a community of one people, one Ohana, we weathered these storms.

Now that the state economy is booming -- thanks to the strong foundation built in the past and the sacrifices of all of us -- we have a budget surplus that presents us with a great opportunity. However, with it comes a great responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, we are an island state subject to the global winds of fortune that no one can assure. And, if we are not wise in preserving our resources and developing new initiatives, we will be dangerously dependent on others for our well being. We will lose **our most precious privilege – the freedom and** independence to direct our own future -- the ability to set our own course. . . to be the master of our own destiny. . . to be steersman of our own canoe.

Last year, your Majority Caucus focused on achieving and maintaining "quality of life" for all who are blessed to call Hawaii home. Working with a broad base of stakeholders, we were successful in passing landmark legislation to preserve Hawaii's most precious resources and protect our important agricultural lands for farming. We addressed the critical issues facing our State from education to health care to public transportation.

This year, we set our sights on investing in the future. We will do so with these guiding principals:

- We will invest our surplus to ensure that our children will have the skills to compete in the global economy and excel in new industries;

- We will invest our surplus to maintain the balance between economic growth and open space, diversified farming, and ecological diversity;
- We will invest our surplus to increase energy efficiency and renewability today so that we will have the energy resources needed for tomorrow; and
- We will invest our surplus in ways that support the expansion and sustainability of a diversified economy.

Mr. Speaker, honored guests, it is with great pride that I share with you the highlights of the Majority's agenda:

EDUCATION

At the top of our agenda is public education.

We have toured some of the neediest school facilities throughout the State. We have talked to parents, teachers, and the children themselves. If we are to expect greater performance from students and teachers, we must provide them with safe and clean schools to learn in. Accordingly, we will spend \$150 million dollars on the repair and maintenance of our public schools, and \$80 million for operations. We will also retrofit some schools to serve as emergency shelters in times of need.

As we look to the future, we also see new communities coming up throughout our State that will require the construction of new schools for new students.

To meet this need, we will use certificate of participation funding -- known as COPS -- to finance private developers. We will leverage \$50 million of public funds and its interest for lease back payments and use by developers to build new schools. This innovative public-private partnership will support new housing project and schools being built together.

We must also consider the serious repair and maintenance need of our University of Hawaii system and its 13 campuses. For too long we have repair and maintenance projects for other needs, and much of their infrastructure is in serious disrepair. As such, we will spend an additional \$84 million on repair and maintenance, with \$50-60 million for operations.

The backlog of repair and maintenance projects throughout the Department of Education and the University of Hawaii is staggering. Now that we have **the means, let's add another "R" to the 3 "Rs" of Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic.** That 4th "R" shall stand for "repair" and for doing it "right."

ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker, last week, the House and Senate unveiled a joint package that centered around the revitalization and promotion of agriculture. It also builds upon our legacy of commitment to our local farmers and small businesses -- the "Moms and Pops" - - because the farmers of today will play a greater role in our economic future of tomorrow.

Many of the fresh foods and local produce that we buy at the grocery store or eat at our restaurants are supplied by local farmers. Diversified agriculture is alive and well, and holds great promise. Not only that, if Hawaii should ever be faced with a shipping strike or natural disaster, the food we get from local farmers will sustain us during those times of crisis. This is more **about public safety than only keeping "country" "country"**.

Today, our farmers need our help. Our State and private irrigation systems are in need of serious repair. Repairing old flumes and ditches will not come cheap, **but rebuilding them would cost a king's ransom and more.**

We propose to establish a \$50 million fund of which \$12 million will be used to repair irrigation systems throughout the State. Our proposals will allow for federal funding and include incentives for private landowners to repair systems on private property. We invite our private land owners and farmers to break bread at the table of common interest and shared rewards.

We will also elevate agriculture in our economy by enhancing the role of the Agribusiness Development Corporation, and transferring responsibilities for marketing, land management, and irrigation system development to the ADC, with the Department of Agriculture retaining its important regulatory function. Farmers, land owners, and consumers will all benefit from these initiatives.

And we will not stop at the fields and the forest but also invest in the laboratories of science and technology and cultivate home grown inventors, inventions, and plug the hole in the dam of human capital and talent leaving our State and Nation.

We have wanted to do this for years. We have longed for an opportunity but lacked the resources to devote significant funding for sometime risky but important research and development. Your Democratic majority believes that now is the time to make that commitment.

We will devote 100 million dollars, and establish an annual dedicated source of funding to support research in life sciences, biotechnology, renewable energy, agricultural, medical sciences, and the Cancer Research Center of Hawaii.

The results will be high paying jobs for Hawaii's best and brightest, with business profits and new technologies remaining in the State. These funds will be used for projects that develop businesses related to the life sciences.

The results will be:

- High paying jobs for Hawaii's best and brightest, with business profits and new technologies remaining in our State; and
- Improvements to our quality of life as we find new cures for illness and disease.

We will become the Life Sciences Center of the Pacific.

To complement this infusion, we want to focus on workforce development for high need areas, such as construction, health care, and nursing. Using \$5 million in State funds, plus the use of federal Reed Act moneys, new programs would be created within the UH community college system for the purpose of building this work force. Home-grown talent, like home-grown food, is just as good, and quite often even better.

HOUSING

Mr. Speaker, it is no exaggeration to say that we are in a housing crisis. Hawaii's lack of affordable housing and the need for shelters must be considered a priority for everyone in this State. No community is immune from this human tragedy. Are we not our brother's keeper?

The Joint Legislative Housing and Homeless Task Force has worked diligently throughout the year, traveling across the State to assess our needs and listen to our communities.

The Majority Package will follow their recommendations to:

- Increase funding for the Rental Housing Trust Fund and programs for homeless and transitional housing;
- Create developer incentives to build moderate income homes;
- Set aside public lands for self-help community housing; and
- Repair our vacant public housing units.

How we resolve this crisis today will have a deep impact on all of us, rich and poor, Malahini and Kamaaina. It does not matter if you live in Waianae or Waialae, we are in the canoe together and we must use our surplus to address this problem now.

ENERGY

This year alone, the cost of crude oil shot up dramatically, directly resulting in higher costs for gasoline and electricity, and indirectly causing prices for just about everything else to rise.

We can no longer afford to take energy for granted. Conservation is not just for environmentalists. It must be practiced by everyone, and government should lead by example.

Your Democratic Majority will set aside \$100 million toward energy conservation in public buildings by installing energy efficient lighting, cooling and heating technologies that will cut our electricity bills and use our natural energy sources.

We will also propose a "Pay-As-You-Save" pilot program for residents to finance the cost of a solar water heater through their monthly electric bill. We believe it will create a "win-win" situation for power companies, landlords, and tenants alike.

Our energy package also includes pilot projects in our schools to install sun-powered batteries where roof repairs are already scheduled.

We will make permanent the renewable energy tax credit and increase the credit for both residential and commercial properties that install solar photovoltaic panels.

We will also consult and partner with such groups as the Apollo Alliance and meld technology with labor and labor with industry. Our energy package will be a hallmark of this session.

CLOSE

Mr. Speaker, your Democratic majority agenda for 2006 was built by a vision for the future -- a vision of what Hawaii can and will be if we plan thoughtfully and demonstrate the political will to make the right decisions today for the future we want tomorrow.

It is all about investing in our future. It is all about believing in ourselves and each other. It is all about believing that there are endless possibilities in the minds and hearts of our youngest citizens. It is about faith in the future and the promise of today.

When we opened this Twenty-third Legislature last year, I shared with you my pride and reverence of the Democrats who served in this very chamber fifty-one years ago. Not only did they make history, but they laid the foundation for our Hawaii built on the unchanging principles of equality, opportunity, and justice for all. Yet, what led them to do all this was really their never-ending desire to make life better for their children and their children's children. I have come to believe this more and more each year as I **reflect upon my own father's legacy.**

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first Filipino immigrants to Hawaii, it is fitting that we not only honor the great contributions and sacrifices of the Sakadas but also recall the sacrifices of all of our predecessors who made Hawaii better for us today. They shared a common bond of hardship, longing, and sacrifice -- a vision of what Hawaii could be and should be, and we are blessed by their love for Hawaii and their unceasing drive to make their dreams come true.

Your Majority members are continuing this legacy of our immigrant forefathers and predecessors and we have created a vision of what Hawaii can be and should be. We each were born for a time such as this. The legacy of the past has already been laid for the legacy of the future. All we must do is do as they did.

I would like to leave you with the words of one of my heroes, Bono, who sang:

"One love
One blood
One life
You got to do what you should
One life
With each other
Sisters
Brothers
One Life
But we're not the same
We get to
Carry each other
Carry each other
One
One"

Mabuhay and Aloha. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

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